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UNION CABINET CLEARS BIGGER, BETTER MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday cleared continuation of the national scheme till 2025-26

PRE-PRIMARY STUDENTS TOO IN PM POSHAN

The centrally sponsored scheme will cover children in pre-primary or Balvatikas in addition to those studying in classes 1 to 8 in government and government-aided schools, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said after the Cabinet meeting. The scheme seeks to provide nutritious hot cooked meals to school students across the country

₹4,400 CRORE CAPITAL INFUSION IN ECGC

- The Cabinet on Wednesday cleared ₹4,400-crore capital infusion in state-owned credit insurance provider ECGC and its listing
- In other decisions, the Cabinet approved the doubling of the Rajkot-Kanalus railway line in Gujarat and the Nimach-Ratlam railway line in Madhya Pradesh | P9

11.8 crore+
CHILDREN STUDYING IN 11.2 LAKH SCHOOLS TO BENEFIT FROM PM POSHAN

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

STATE'S FARMERS SUFFER SHORTAGE OF KEY FERTILISER

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

AT a time when farmers should have been equipped with adequate stocks of fertilisers, many parts of the state are reporting a severe shortage of the crucial input. The shortage is mainly of Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP), which is the much-preferred fertiliser across the country as it contains nitrogen and phosphorus that are the primary nutrients for crops.

Farmers and officials have reported insufficient stocks of DAP at cooperative societies and dealers.

But Agriculture Minister BC Patil on Wednesday said there is no shortage of fertilisers in the state. "There may be a delay of one or two days in getting (the supplies) due to transportation issues. If anyone is creating artificial scarcity, action will be taken against them," he warned. Countering the minister, Kodihalli Chandrashekar, state president, Karnataka Rajya Raita Sangha, said he is getting calls from desperate farmers from many places over fertiliser shortage. "The government may have the stocks, but the farmers are not getting what they want. I will take it up with the government," he added.

Kodagu district requires around 4,500 to 5,000 tonnes of DAP, potash and urea. But there has been an acute shortage for the last two months, as only around 200 tonnes have been supplied so far, said Srinivas SG, a major fertiliser dealer and distributor in the district. To address the shortage, they have supplied farmers with other fertilisers, he added.

In some parts of Srirangapatna in Mandya district, farmers are not getting adequate quantities of DAP and urea for paddy and sugarcane crops. "There has been a shortage over the last few weeks," said Somashekara RA, a farmer from Rampura near Srirangapatna. P4

Congress high command looking at options to replace the Punjab unit chief if he refuses to get off his high horse

Navjot Singh Sidhu
The cricketer-turned-politician has burnt his bridges with the Gandhi family. He kind of nuked himself without an exit strategy

Charanjit Singh Channi
The new chief minister has become the face of the negotiations as the party high command refuses to speak to Sidhu directly

Sonia Gandhi
The Congress chief is angry at the sudden resignation of Sidhu, has not spoken to Sidhu. Unlikely to give him any leeway

Ghulam Nabi Azad
One of the G23 rebels, he has questioned the decision-making process in the party, demanded an urgent meeting of the CWC

Amarinder Singh
The veteran Congress leader is readying to jump ship. Stopping the AAP from coming to power is his biggest concern now

Gandhis wait for Sidhu to blink, CM go-between

HARPREET BAJWA & RICHA SHARMA @ Chandigarh / New Delhi

THE political crisis triggered by Punjab Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu's resignation deepened on Wednesday with the cricketer-turned-politician refusing to relent and the party high command considering names for the new PCC chief. However, the Congress has still not accepted Sidhu's resignation so as to give him time to rethink his decision.

On Wednesday, Sidhu released a video claiming his is fighting for pro-people issues and that he is ready to sacrifice anything to safeguard his principles.

Sources said the party legislators close to Sidhu are in constant touch with him and are trying to convince him to withdraw his resignation. A few of them including two cabinet ministers – Pargat Singh and Amarinder Singh Raja Warring – have told Sidhu that his decision could backfire. "We have requested Sidhu to rethink his decision if not for himself then for the party and the leaders who stood by him. But, as of now he is in no mood for a compromise in his vision of Punjab," said a leader on condition of anonymity.

AICC incharge for Punjab Harish Rawat, along with emissary Harish Chaudhary, has been talking to Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi to resolve the crisis but they are also short-listing names of PCC probables to replace Sidhu. Sources said the party high command is miffed at Sidhu for his decision quit the post. None of the Gandhis has spoken to him after the resignation, sources claimed.

Meanwhile, senior leaders in Delhi have rung up party MLAs to ascertain their point of view and also to gauge Sidhu's real support within the party. A few newly appointed cabinet ministers, who did not attend the emergency cabinet meeting convened by Chief Minister Channi on Tuesday, were also contacted by the central leadership.

A senior leader said the party high command had got positive feedback on Channi and that is why they stood by the new CM even as Sidhu tried to have his way in the selection of ministers and allocation of portfolios as well as appointments of senior officials.

BJP closer to board Capt for poll match

MANISH ANAND @ New Delhi

SHORT of formalities, the BJP appears to have boarded former Punjab chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh in its bid to turn Punjab politics upside down. Amarinder called on the Union Minister for Home Affairs Amit Shah at his residence on Wednesday, triggering wild speculation.

The BJP appears to be waiting for the Charanjit Channi-led Congress government in Punjab to collapse on the floor of the Assembly when the vote of confidence takes place.

For the record, Amarinder tweeted that he held talks with Shah on the farm laws. But the BJP has for a long time believed that the farmers' agitation was propped up by Amarinder to unsettle the Shiromani Akali Dal. With the scene changing, a senior BJP functionary opined that the farmers' agitation could be relegated to the sidelines after the patronage is withdrawn. Building a counter narrative as also the support of the Centre will give Amarinder the face-saver to change his spin on farm issues, he added.

Both the BJP and Amarinder are on the same page in their resolve to stop the Aam Aadmi Party — seen to be in an advantageous position after the Congress leadership's harakiri — from coming to power in Punjab. The future roadmap will be revealed after Channi is voted out and Central Rule is imposed, the functionary said.

The BJP hopes to ride on Amarinder's political nationalism and Sikh pride in the polls. It hopes he would be able to get a sizeable chunk of the Congress legislators to bolt. He's seen within the BJP as a perfect match, with nationalism and his anti-Pakistan rhetoric, while being a seasoned foil to the rural hegemony of the SAD among the Jat Sikhs.

TUG-OF-WAR

1. Sidhu tells party he would not rethink on his designation unless the political changes in the government are reversed
2. Sidhu tells mediators he would not be a puppet in the hands of the party high command
3. On the other hand, the high command does not want Sidhu to remote-control the government in the state
4. Senior leaders fear if given a free hand, Sidhu could get into vindictive politics
5. The resignation of state cabinet minister Razia Sultana, a Sidhu loyalist, is yet to be accepted by CM Channi but lobbying has already started among MLAs for this cabinet berth

AHEAD OF DIWALI

SC keeps up heat on crackers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

TAKING serious note of a CBI report on the continued use of banned chemicals in firecrackers, the Supreme Court on Wednesday said prima facie the court's order on use of barium and labelling of fireworks were violated.

A bench of justices M R Shah and A S Bopanna, however, gave six fireworks majors 'one further opportunity' to put forward their case against hauling them up for contempt of court and posted the matter for October 6.

"Everyday there is some celebration in this country. But we have to consider other aspects too. We cannot let people suffer and die," the bench observed.

The CBI report stated that chemical analysis of samples of crackers and raw materials collected from factories established the presence of barium and barium salts. Also, huge quantities of barium/barium salts were bought by the manufacturers despite a ban on them in 2019. Besides, "labels of finished crackers did not contain the chemical composition and year of manufacture," the bench observed.

The court had on March 3 last year slapped contempt notices on Standard Fireworks, Hindustan Fireworks, Vinayaga Fireworks Industries, Shree Mariamman Fireworks, Shree Suryakalaa Fireworks and Selva Vinayagar Fireworks for violation of earlier orders on using banned chemicals.

In first missive, Taliban seek flight resumption between Af and India

PUSHKAR BANAKAR @ New Delhi

IN its first official communication with India since forming the government in Afghanistan, the Taliban on Wednesday wrote to Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) chief Arun Kumar urging him to resume commercial flights between the two countries. The Civil Aviation Ministry is reviewing it.

India had stopped commercial flights from Afghanistan after the Taliban overran Kabul on August 15. "The intention of this letter is to keep the smooth passenger movement between the two countries based on the signed MoU and our national carriers (Ariana Afghan airline and Kam Air) aim to commence their scheduled flights. Therefore, Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority requests you to facilitate their commercial flights," the letter signed by minister Hameedullah Akhunzada, stated.

Taliban is said to be keen on getting around 1,000 Afghans, who had arrived in India, back home. "India has invested over $3 billion in development projects in every Afghan region, so it's a valuable partner for whoever runs the country. Afghanistan cannot be reconstructed without some form of Indian assistance. The first step is to resume flights," said Russia-based analyst Andrew Korybko.

ROWING IN UNISON
Personnel from the Madras Sappers paddle a canoe on Ulsoor Lake near the Madras Engineers Group (MEG) Centre, ahead of the 241st MEG Day celebrations, in Bengaluru on Wednesday | VINOD KUMAR T

JAB-O-METER

TAKE YOUR SHOT

September 28: **49,45,169 doses**

September 29: **59,48,118 doses**

TOTAL DOSES: **88,28,81,352**

NATIONWIDE	SEPT 28	SEPT 29
Fresh cases	18,795	18,870
Recoveries	26,030	28,178
Deaths	179	378

KARNATAKA	SEPT 28	SEPT 29
Fresh cases	629	539
Recoveries	782	591
Deaths	17	17

DANGER LURKING AS PER 2019 SURVEY

ZONE	NO. OF BUILDINGS	DEMOLISHED BUILDINGS
South	33	8
East	46	0
West	34	0
Mahadevapura	3	0
Yelahanka	60	0
Dasarahalli	8	1
RR Nagar	1	1
Bommanahalli	0	0
Total	185	10

Resurvey dilapidated buildings, says BBMP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE collapse of two buildings in Bengaluru on two consecutive days has jolted the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) into action to identify dilapidated and vulnerable buildings and list those that need to be demolished across the city. The Palike is already in possession of a survey done in 2019, but civic body officials seem to have failed to adequately act upon it.

BBMP Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta on Wednesday said that directions have been issued to all engineers, zonal and joint commissioners to conduct a resurvey of all the dilapidated and vulnerable buildings in the city and to submit a report within 15 days.

After holding a meeting with the officials, a day after the second building collapsed near Dairy Circle, Gupta said as per the earlier survey conducted in 2019, notices had been issued to 185 buildings and 10 of them were demolished.

CONTINUED ON: P2

Classes 1-5 may reopen after Dasara vacation

PEARL MARIA D'SOUZA @ Bengaluru

THE Education Department is getting ready to reopen offline classes for Standards 1-5 after the Dasara holidays, though there is a mixed response to the decision.

Primary and Secondary Education Minister BC Nagesh told The New Indian Express that they are making preparations to reopen primary schools, but are waiting for approval from the Covid Technical Advisory Committee.

The Department of Public Instructions had in June declared 11-day Dasara holidays from October 10 to 20.

The minister had earlier announced that classes 6-12 will start functioning at full capacity from October 1 in districts that have less than 1 per cent Covid-positivity rate.

The schools will open five days a week, while Saturdays and Sundays will be set aside to clean and sanitise the premises.

The department is formalising a plan to resume the mid-day meal scheme, but the final decision will be taken after October 1.

CONTINUED ON: P7

'No hike in fees for engineering this year'
The Higher Education Department has convinced private engineering colleges not to increase the fee this year. Though the institutions had sought a hike of 30 per cent, the department cited the Covid situation to put it off. While a college association representative claimed that the department has agreed to a 10 per cent annual hike from next year, an official denied it. P7

EXPRESS READ

High Court rejects Umesh Reddy's plea

Bengaluru: The Karnataka High Court on Wednesday dismissed a plea by serial rapist-murderer Umesh Reddy questioning the rejection of his mercy plea by the President of India, adding that there was no delay in considering his plea by the President | P6

Ex-Goa CM Luizinho Faleiro joins TMC

Kolkata: Former Goa CM Luizinho Faleiro, who recently quit the Congress, joined the Trinamool Congress on Wednesday and called for uniting various factions of the grand old party under the leadership of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee | P10

Ex-serviceman chops off wife's leg in B'gavi

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Belagavi

IN a blood-curdling incident, an ex-serviceman chopped off the leg of his estranged wife on the premises of a court at Bailhongal town of Belagavi district on Wednesday.

The accused, Shivanand Adaki (36) from Nanagundikoppa village of Bailhongal taluk, married Jayamala (34) of Varur village in Dharwad district 11 years ago. But their marriage hit a rocky patch and Jayamala started living at her mother's house along with their eight-year-old daughter. Their marital dispute was being heard at the Diwani court in Bailhongal.

On Wednesday morning, Jayamala was at the court for the hearing. She was leaving the court after the hearing when Shivanand allegedly attacked her with a sharp sword, cutting her left leg below the ankle. Jayamala fell and started bleeding profusely.

The police shifted her to a private hospital in Belagavi, where the doctors were trying to conduct a procedure to reattach her leg.

Shivanand later surrendered before the police.